



Y Morgrugyn Cloff

*On the bank of the river he could see a tall tree, and one half
of it was burning from its roots to its crown, and the other
half with green leaves on it.*

Peredur's otherworld image perfectly captures the essence of the Welsh medieval tales known as *The Mabinogion*, rooted as they are in the world of Celtic mythology as much as in the real world.

The origins of these eleven tales are a mystery. The Welsh bards celebrated their patrons in verse, but they could also be proficient storytellers whose medium was prose or prose and verse. These storytellers, the *cyfarwyddiaid*, were required to know hundreds of tales, which were delivered orally, before in later years some of them were committed to writing. So the tales had no fixed form but took shape and colour from innumerable minds practising a craft that flourished for a thousand years.

Inevitably, the freedom which characterizes oral transmission led to frequent distortions and misunderstandings even before they were written down during the fourteenth century, possibly by monks unfamiliar with the myths and out of sympathy with the subject matter.

It is generally agreed that the tales achieved their present form between the eleventh and thirteenth century, that they were not the work of a single hand and that the material was much older, some of it as old as the dawn of the Celtic world. There is virtually no reference to contemporary events, but in the earliest tale the heroes, including King Arthur, are chieftains who fight on foot, while in the latest, they are knights who wear armour and fight on horseback.

These tales are fine examples of Celtic genius and I have tried in my abbreviated versions of those I have selected to convey the fullness of their flavour rather than attempt translating entire tales, a task already accomplished by many Welsh scholars, which I am not. Indeed the passages I have translated were achieved with much help from Gwyn and Thomas Jones, whose phrasing seemed, often, beyond improvement.

The title of course is borrowed from *Culhwch and Olwen*. One of the forty tasks Ysbaddaden Chief Giant exacts from Culhwch as a price for winning Olwen is to gather, in a day, nine hestors of sown flax seed to make a white head-dress for Olwen's wedding.

Help is given by grateful ants, *with none of it wanting save for a single flax seed. And the lame ant brought that in before nightfall.*

My own contribution to illuminating these tales has come late and my handicap surely as great as that of . . .

The Lame Ant

Culhwch and Olwen

Of all the tales of *The Mabinogion*, *Culhwch and Olwen* is the oldest, most primitive and most barbaric; a magnificent whale of a tale, awash with Celtic lore, glorious in its vitality and rich in ironic humour and self parody. It is also the oldest surviving tale of King Arthur in any language—no figure out of a French romance, but a wild Celtic chieftain, whose power, authority and magnetism are implicit in his own behaviour and that of his followers who comprise his *teulu*, or war band, as much as his court.

The plot is pure folk-tale. Culhwch's stepmother vows he will never marry till he wins Olwen, the daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant, who imposes on him forty seemingly impossible tasks because he knows that he must die when his daughter marries.

On his father's advice, Culhwch goes to seek help from his kinsman, King Arthur. As the youth sets out for Arthur's court, he makes a splendid figure, which is some compensation for the fact that he is almost totally eclipsed, as the tale proceeds, by the prominence of Arthur and his shape-shifting companions. *Off went the boy on a light grey steed four winters old...in his hand an axe...that would draw blood from the wind and swifter than the swiftest dewdrop from the stalk to the ground when the dew would be heaviest in the month of June.* Two brindled greyhounds with collars of gold sport like terns around him. His four-cornered mantle of purple is set with a ruby gold apple in each corner, each apple worth a hundred cows.

Never a hair-tip stirred upon him, so exceedingly light was the motion of his steed on his way to the gate of Arthur's court.

'Is there a porter?' called out the youth.

'There is, and as for you, may you lose your head for asking,' is the deflating reply.

Culhwch is, at first, refused entry to the court by the porter, on the grounds that, *knife has gone into meat, drink into horn and a throng is in Arthur's court.* Save for the son of a rightful king or a craftsman who brings his craft, none may enter until the morning, but the youth is offered, meanwhile, meat for his dogs, corn for his horse and, for himself, hot peppered chops, wine, delectable songs—and a woman to sleep with!

Arthur, however, admits him promptly and grants whatever he requests, *'as far as wind dries, as far as rain wets, as far as sun runs, as far as sea stretches, as far as earth extends...save only my ship and my mantle and Caledfwlch, my sword...'* His list providently excludes too his spear, shield and dagger and, belatedly, Gwenhwyfar, his wife.

Culhwch calls the entire court to witness the granting of this boon. An incantation of two hundred and sixty names is enlivened with epithets like Osla Big Knife, Cilydd Hundred Holds, Echel Big Hip, and Glewlwyd Mighty Grasp. Some are accompanied by potted histories, like Morfran, son of Tegid—*no man thrust his weapon in him at Camlan, so exceedingly ugly was he, all thought he was a devil helping. There was hair on him like the hair of a stag.* Farcical characters are introduced, like Bwlch, Cyfwlch and Syfwlch, their wives, Late-bearer, Ill-bearer and Full-bearer with their three maidservants, Bad, Worse and Worst of All.

Six of Arthur's most magically endowed warriors go with Culhwch to find Olwen, yet when they come upon the formidable shepherd, Custennin, and his giant mastiff, Cai suggests Gwrhryr should go and have a word with him. To which Gwrhryr replies, *'Cai, I never promised to go any further than you yourself would go, so let us go together.'* When they greet the shepherd and ask if things are well with him, he replies that he has no affliction apart from his wife. She, however, is Culhwch's aunt who runs so enthusiastically to embrace them, Cai hastily forestalls her, snatching a log from the wood pile to thrust between her hands. The log is squeezed to a twisted coil and Cai observes, *'Woman, had it been me you squeezed like that, no one else would need to love me!'*

Ysbaddaden has killed all but one of the shepherd's twenty four sons and Cai offers the boy his protection. In return, the shepherd's wife arranges a meeting between Culhwch and Olwen. In a passage of graceful lyricism, Olwen makes her first appearance in the tale. *She was sent for and she came, wearing a robe of flame red silk, and around the maid's throat a red gold torque inset with precious pearls and rubies. Yellower was her hair than the flowers of the broom, whiter her flesh than the foam of a wave, whiter her palms and*

fingers than the buds of a campion amidst the fine gravel of a bubbling spring. Not the eye of the mewed hawk, nor the eye of the thrice-mewed falcon, not an eye was there brighter than hers. Whiter were her breasts than the breast of a swan, redder her cheeks than the red of a foxglove. Whoever beheld her would be filled with love for her. Four white trefoils sprang up behind her wherever she trod, and thus was she called Olwen.

Culhwch goes with his companions to ask for the hand of Olwen, foiling Ysbaddaden's attempts to kill them by hurling back the spears he throws. The first pierces the giant's knee and he complains that it stings like a gadfly; the second goes through his chest and out through his back and he curses Culhwch because he will now suffer tightness of chest going uphill, stomach aches and frequent loss of appetite. The third penetrates his eye and comes out at the nape of his neck and he swears this will cause his eyes to water in the wind, and he will suffer headaches and dizzy spells every new moon. He then makes his bargain with Culhwch: 'When I get what I shall name to you, then shall you get my daughter.' And he lists the tasks.

These include rescuing a prisoner from a location known only to the Oldest Animal; Cai, Bedwyr and Gwrhyr, Interpreter of Tongues, achieve this task. They seek out the Blackbird of Cilgwri, a creature of great antiquity but not as old as the Stag of Rhedynfre and younger is he than the Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd. But though he came before the race of men the owl is not as old as the Eagle of Gwernabwy. It is the Salmon of Llyn Llyw who knows where Mabon, son of Modron, is imprisoned and takes Cai and Gwrhyr on his back to rescue him.

In fact, Arthur and his magically endowed followers achieve most of these tasks, though half are not recounted and two that are were not mentioned by Ysbaddaden.

Obtaining the blood of the Black Witch from the Up-

lands of Hell to stiffen Ysbaddaden's beard for shaving is the final task, which follows the furious chase from Ireland, all across South Wales and the Severn Estuary in pursuit of the magic boar, Twrch Trwyth, for the sake of the comb, razor and shears between its ears. These are needed to shave Ysbaddaden for the wedding of his daughter. The headlong sweep across Wales is the magnificent climax of the story, for Twrch and his brood prove a formidable match even for Arthur and his warriors. Having fought nine days and nine nights with only one piglet slain, Arthur sends Gwrhyr to negotiate.

Gwrhyr went in the form of a bird and alighted above the lair of Twrch Trwyth and his young pigs. And Gwrhyr Interpreter of Tongues asked him, 'For the sake of Him who put this shape on you, if you can speak, I beg that one of you come and talk with Arthur.'

Grugyn Silver Bristle made answer. Like wings of silver were all his bristles; the path he took through wood and meadows could be seen by the way his bristles glittered. This was the answer Grugyn gave: 'By Him who put this form on us we will neither do nor say anything for Arthur. Harm enough has God done to us to have made us in this shape, without you too coming to fight us. . . . And tomorrow in the morning we will set out from here and go into Arthur's country, and there we will do all the mischief we can.' The reply of Grugyn is no empty threat, for even after twenty of Arthur's men have lost their lives, *whatever mischief was come by before, that was play to what was to come.*

Twrch himself is never killed; he is driven into the sea finally and *from that time never a one has known where he went.* But the comb, razor and shears have been won and are used to shave Ysbaddaden, flesh and skin to the bone and his ears too, before he is dragged out by his hair for beheading. *And that night, Culhwch slept with Olwen and she was his only wife so long as he lived.*

Mynet a oruc Gwrhŷr yn rith ederyn, a disgynno a
wnaeth och benn y wal ef a'e seithlydyn moch. A
gouyn a oruc Gwrhŷr Gwalstawt Ieithoed idaw,
'Yr y Gwr a'th wnaeth ar y delw honn, or gellwch
dywedut, y harchaf dyuot un ohonawch y ymdidan
ac Arthur.' Gwrtheb a wnaeth Grugyn Gwerych
Ereint — mal adaned aryant oed y wrych oll — y
fford y kerdei ar goet ac ar uaes y gwelit ual y
llithrei y wrych.

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Turno Turno and his young ones. And
Tongues asked him, For the sake of

cc Arthur, George & John his brother

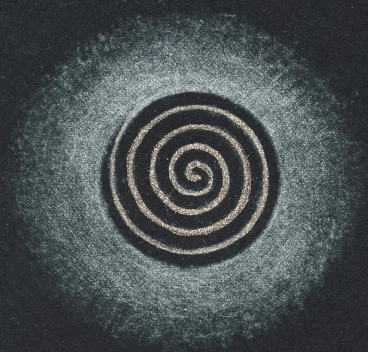
nor say anything for it, thus, *Mark* *the Good*
have made us in this shape, without you too.

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Pedeir Keinc — The Four Branches

Whoever, probably before the end of the eleventh century, gave the *Four Branches of the Mabinogion* the form in which they are now preserved was the heir of many bards and storytellers but, despite the complexity of the material, they are the product of one mind, a piece of consciously original literature, based on traditional material, but devoid of the marks of oral recitation. They were written, 'in the finest Welsh prose of his age, by a grand master.'

That the author was a man, probably a monk or cleric of some sort, was never challenged until Andrew Breeze argued, not only that the author was a woman, but boldly identified her as the particularly romantic twelfth century Princess Gwenllïan who led an attack, in her husband's absence, on the Norman fortress of Kidwelly and was killed on the battlefield. That field, *Maes Gwenllïan*, is her sole monument. She might have remained as invisible in the pages of medieval history as almost all her female contemporaries had not her grand-nephew been the chronicler, Gerald of Wales. Much of the circumstantial evidence Andrew Breeze musters in support of his theory is interesting, but the dating of Gwenllïan's supposed writing flies in the face of general opinion since Gwenllïan was not born until 1100 and these are not the writings of any teenager but of a mature and compassionate observer.

I have in my own background reading, as well as in many readings of the tales, become more and more convinced that if the author was not a woman, he was a very unusual cleric. Gerald was no cloistered monk, but women in his writings receive scant attention and usually appear only to be condemned as sources of temptation and expense to men, especially the clergy. Yet the characterization of the women in *The Four Branches* is far stronger than that of the men.

Indeed the roles of Pwyll and Rhiannon turn upside down the social conventions of the time, regarding marriage. *The Welsh Law of Women* makes it clear that a woman's role was entirely passive. She was given to her husband by the male members of her kin to unite two families. But Rhiannon seeks out Pwyll, declares her love for him and arranges the marriage feast herself. Thereafter, Pwyll is portrayed as a bungling incompetent saved

from the consequences of his rashness by the resourceful and decisive Rhiannon. A feminist fairy tale, in fact, in which the resolute princess rescues the compliant prince. And if it is argued that the assertive Rhiannon is best understood in the framework of her mythological origins in Epona, it seems odd that a medieval monk would choose to emphasise his heroine's links with a pagan goddess.

Patrick Ford comments astutely that, 'he (the author) seems to be at his narrative best when reporting conversations between men and women and probing the psychological relationship between them.' Certainly the author is remarkably at ease dealing with relationships of a sexual nature, from the standpoint of a woman. And as significant as the author's lack of interest in fighting is the concern for social protocol at meals, the preoccupation with domestic arrangements, the interest in child-bearing, childlessness and the nurturing of children. These are not observations that support the view of a monk as author.

Sioned Davies suggests a lawyer of some sort might have been the author, but certainly a cleric, since writing was a restricted skill in the Middle Ages. But there is the mystery of who wrote the letter Branwen sent, under a starling's wing, to her brother Bendigeidfran. Relegated to the kitchen of a hostile Irish court, she was hardly likely to find someone to write it for her. One assumes she wrote it herself, yet the author doesn't feel this was something that needed explaining. Perhaps there were women of high rank who were literate, were familiar with the laws of the court, pertaining to insult and honour price and who enjoyed listening to the tales of the *cyfarwyddiaid*. Such women had a lot of time on their hands and not all of them could have enjoyed embroidery! And if such a woman wrote *The Four Branches* she would have been no more of an anomaly than a twelfth century heroine who led her troops to battle like a 'Queen of the Amazons', or a Nest, whose sexual activities scandalised her grandson, the same Gerald of Wales.

The action of *The Four Branches* is set in a remote and timeless past; their protagonists have their roots in the gods and goddesses of Celtic mythology, but gods and

men blend indistinguishably, while the action moves seamlessly between the real and Otherworld.

Pryderi is the link figure who appears in all four Branches and it has been suggested that he may have played a more important role in earlier versions of the tales. If so, the emphasis has changed. His birth in the first Branch is less important than the effect of his im-

mediate disappearance, while in the second Branch he is merely listed as one of the seven who survived the disaster in Ireland. He plays a more prominent part in the third Branch, his youthful impetuosity a foil to Manawydan's patience, tolerance and mature good sense. In the final Branch he is tricked by, and later courageously loses his life to, Gwydion and his magic arts.



Pwyll Prince of Dyfed

In the first of *The Four Branches* Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, sets out from his court at Arberth to go hunting. Separated from his companions, he comes upon a pack of shining white dogs with gleaming red ears, in the act of bringing down a stag. They are clearly Otherworld dogs but Pwyll drives them off and sets his own dogs on the stag. A grey clad rider approaches and berates Pwyll for his discourteous behaviour. He reveals that he is Arawn, King of Annwn—the Celtic Otherworld—and informs the embarrassed Pwyll that he can redeem his honour by doing battle on his behalf with Arawn's rival, Hafgan. To achieve this, Arawn changes shape with Pwyll and they will rule each other's kingdom for a year with none knowing the difference, after which time Pwyll will meet with Hafgan. As part of the bargain, Arawn promises Pwyll he will have the fairest lady he has ever seen to sleep with him every night.

This is the stock material of folk myth but the tale takes on a more interestingly human note when Pwyll meets Arawn's Queen, who is indeed the fairest and most gracious lady he has ever met. Yet when they retire to bed he turns his back to her, refusing to speak until the morning, and *however affectionate they were by day, not one night during that year was different from the first one.*

At the year's end, Pwyll defeats Hafgan in combat, annexes Hafgan's kingdom to Arawn's and triumphantly meets Arawn at the appointed time and place, having won back his honour and the friendship of Arawn, who then restores them to their own shapes.

But when Arawn, now returned to his own kingdom, gets into bed with his wife that night, she is not unnaturally surprised at his renewed interest in bedtime conversation and love-making, after a year's unexplained abstinence. *'Dear God,' she thought, 'he's very differently minded to-night from what he's been since a year from tonight!'* He woke later and spoke to her several times without any response.

'Why don't you speak to me?' he asked.

'I'll tell you,' she replied, 'I haven't spoken as much in such a place as this during the past year.'

'Why,' he said, 'we have always talked intimately to each other.'

'Shame on me,' she declared, 'if from the time we got between the bedclothes, there has been either pleasure or talk or even you turning your face to me let alone anything more between us, since a year from last night.'

Somewhat amazed at Pwyll's sustained chastity he confesses it wasn't he who'd been her bedfellow, and tells her the whole story. There is more than a hint of pique in her reply: *'I confess to God, as far as withstanding the temptations of the flesh and keeping true to you goes, you had a firm hold on your friend!'*

The second half of this branch begins with Pwyll rising after the first sitting of a great feast at his court to take a walk—no doubt to aid his digestion. He and his men go up to Gorsedd Arbeth, a magical mound, which it seems, still exists, causing a kink in the A487, some two miles east of Cardigan! While waiting for some promised marvel to begin, they sat down.

And as they were sitting, they saw a woman on a great majestic pale white horse, a garment of shining brocaded silk about her, coming along the highway that skirted the mound. The horse had a slow, steady pace, so it appeared to anyone who saw it, and was drawing level with the mound.

'Men,' said Pwyll, 'does any one of you know the rider?'

'No Lord,' they replied.

'Let one of you go and meet her to find out who she is,' he said.

One of them rose, but when he got to the road she had gone past him. He followed her as quickly as he could on foot, but the more he hastened, the further she was from him. And when he perceived it was of no avail for him to follow her, he returned to Pwyll and said to him, 'Lord, no one in the world can pursue her on foot.'

'Aye,' said Pwyll, 'go to the court and take the fastest horse you know, to go after her.'

A first, second and third rider fail to catch up with her, even on the fastest horse available although hers seems to be moving slowly. Finally, Pwyll races after her himself, but without success until he cries out to her to wait for him. *'I will gladly,' she replies, 'and it would have been better for your horse if you had asked long since.'* And so we meet the redoubtable Rhiannon.

Fearlessly, she unveils her face, announces that the purpose of her errand is to meet him, before she is given in

marriage to a suitor of her father's choosing, and that her own choice is Pwyll. He, for his part, thought that the face of every maiden and every lady he had ever seen was unlovely compared with her face and had he the whole world to choose from, she would be his choice. Rhiannon then sets the date of their marriage feast a year from that day, and bidding him keep his promise, goes her way.

At the appointed time, Pwyll sets off with his retainers for the court of Hefeydd Hen, Rhiannon's father. In the course of the wedding feast, a noble youth arrives and asks a boon of Pwyll, who freely grants it before asking what it is. Immediately Rhiannon sees the consequence of his rashness, but the crafty suppliant points out that Pwyll's promise was given before the whole court. He is in fact Gwawl, the suitor Rhiannon rejected, and the boon he asks is her hand in marriage and the wedding feast prepared for Pwyll. Pwyll was silent, for there was no answer he could give. *'Hold your tongue for as long as you will,' said Rhiannon, 'for never has a man made feebler use of his wits than you.'*

But Rhiannon swiftly outlines a plan to Pwyll whereby he can trick Gwawl, and to buy time, points out to the impatient suitor that the wedding feast is not Pwyll's to give, but hers, and she has already bestowed it on the men of Dyfed. He must wait a year to come and claim her, when another wedding feast will be prepared for him. It is at this second feast that Pwyll, acting on Rhiannon's plan, outwits Gwawl and wins Rhiannon, but in the process,

Gwawl is not only grossly humiliated, but must pledge never to take revenge for it.

After two years Rhiannon is still childless and Pwyll is urged by his men to take another wife. He gains a year's respite and Rhiannon produces a son, but the child disappears that night while Rhiannon and her women are asleep. The terrified women agree to smear the sleeping Rhiannon with the blood of a deer hound pup and accuse her of killing her child. Rhiannon begs them to tell the truth: *'Poor creatures,' said Rhiannon, 'by the Lord God who knows all things, do not accuse me falsely... I swear to God that I will protect you... you will come to no hurt for telling the truth.'* But for all her words, whether reasoning or pleading, she got but the one answer from the women. And rather than wrangle further Rhiannon accepts the penance imposed on her: to sit seven years by the horse block at the gate, recounting her disgrace to all comers and offering to carry any who wished on her back.

Meanwhile Teyrnnon, a lord of Gwent, finds a richly wrapped baby on his doorstep. Teyrnnon and his childless wife agree to raise the child as their own and they call him Gwri Golden Hair. Eventually news of Rhiannon's fate reaches Teyrnnon who realises Gwri must be the baby who was stolen from her, and he and his wife decide that the child must be returned to his rightful parents. He is renamed Pryderi by the grateful Pwyll and Rhiannon, and grows to be a handsome and accomplished youth who rules Dyfed justly after Pwyll's death.

Ac wal y bydynt yn eisted, wynt a welynt gwreic
ar uarch canwelw mawr aruchel, a gwisc eureit,
llathreit, o bali amdanei, yn dyuot ar hyt y prifford
a gerdei heb law yr orssed. Kerdet araf, guastat
oed gan y march ar uryt y neb a'y guelei, ac yn
dyuot y ogyuuch a'r orssed. 'A wyr,' heb y Pwyll,
'a oes ohonawchi, a adnappo y uarchoges?' 'Nac
oes, Arglwyd,' heb wynt. 'Aet un,' heb ynteu, 'yn
y herbyn y wybot pwy yw.' Un a gyuodes y uynydd,
a phan doeth yn y herbyn y'r ford, neut athoed hi
heibaw. Y hymllit a wnaeth ual y gallei gyntaf o
pedestric. A fei mwyaf uei y urys ef, pellaf uydei
hitheu e wrthaw ef.

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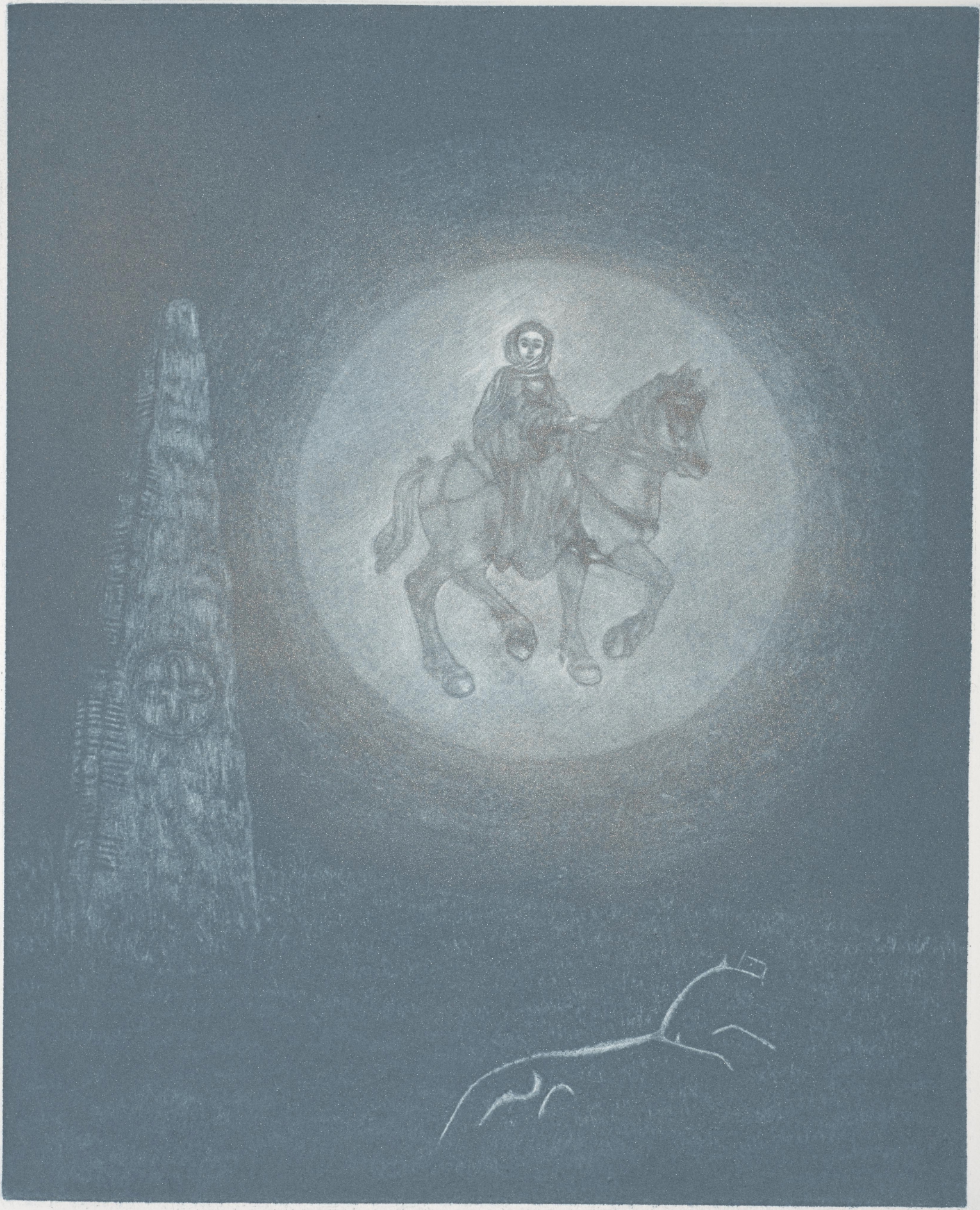
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After two years Rhiannon is still childless and is urged by his men to take another wife. He gains a brief respite and Rhiannon produces a son, but the next day appears that night while Rhiannon and her women are asleep. The terrified women agree to smear the sleeping Rhiannon with the blood of a deer, found pup and smear her of killing her child. Rhiannon begs the women to know all things, do not accuse me falsely. I swear to God that you will come to no harm for telling the truth. But for all her words, the women are pleading, she is the one answer from the women. And rather than witness her own death, Rhiannon locks the door and goes to sit seven years by the horse block at the gate, awaiting her disgrace to all comes and offering to carry any who

Meanwhile Teyrnion, a lord of Gwent, finds a small wrapped baby on his doorstep. Teyrnion and his children agree to raise the child as their own and they call him Gwri Golden Hair. Eventually news of Rhiannon's disappearance reaches Teyrnion and he must be the man who was stolen from her, and he and his wife decide the child must be returned to his rightful parents. He is treated as a foster child by the man and grows to be a handsome and accomplished young man. He is married justly after Pwyll's death.



Branwen Daughter of Llŷr

If Rhiannon's *élan* is partly a legacy of the story's mythological underpinnings, Branwen's passivity is that of the traditional peaceweaver given in marriage solely to effect a union between two islands. She is very much a medieval ideal of womanhood: noble, generous and faithful. But she is not weak or ineffectual. She is active in her role as peaceweaver, and having patiently borne her servitude in the kitchen for three years she acts to end it.

Her brother, Bendigeidfran, the giant King of the Island of the Mighty, has his capital in London, but prefers to reside in his courts in North Wales. Matholwch, King of Ireland, sails across the sea to ask for Branwen's hand in marriage, thereby forging a powerful alliance. The agreement is reached without her half-brother, Efnisien, being consulted. Outraged, Efnisien hideously mutilates all Matholwch's horses. This gross insult to a visiting king under his protection requires Bendigeidfran to pay a compensation fitting for a king. He replaces every horse and bestows on him many gifts, including a magic, life-restoring cauldron that had been brought to him from Ireland.

After the wedding feast, Matholwch returns to Ireland with Branwen and although she bears him a son, he is persuaded, belatedly, by his followers that insufficient reparation had been offered him for the insult over the horses, and that Branwen should be banished to the kitchen and daily struck a blow by the butcher. She spends three years in this way but trains a starling to fly with a letter to her brother. When he learns of her condition, Bendigeidfran leads an expedition to Ireland to avenge her.

In those days, we are told, the waters between Ireland and the Island of the Mighty were not deep; his men cross in ships but the giant, Bendigeidfran, wades across, confusing Matholwch's swineherds on the seashore who report a forest in the deep where, before, they had not seen a single tree. Messengers go to Branwen and ask, 'Lady, what do you think this is?'

'Lady, though I am not,' she replies, sharply, 'I know what it is. It is the men of the Island of the Mighty coming over having heard of my penance and my humiliation.' And she warns them her brother looks angered.

When they see the strength of Bendigeidfran's forces the Irish sue for peace and an agreement is almost reached, Matholwch offering to install as king his young son, Bendigeidfran's nephew. But Efnisien again intervenes. He seizes the child, just as the peace terms are concluded, and throws him headlong into the fire. Branwen, seeing her son burning in the flames, tries to leap in after him but Bendigeidfran prevents her, supporting her between his shoulders and his shield during the ensuing battle, which is to bring about the destruction of Ireland and all but seven of the men of the Island of the Mighty.

The Irish at first restore their slain warriors by casting their bodies into the cauldron of rebirth but in an act of self-sacrifice, Efnisien has himself thrown in, and stretching himself out, bursts the cauldron into four and his heart bursts too.

Mortally wounded, Bendigeidfran commands his remaining followers to strike off his head and carry it to the White Mount in London and bury it with its face towards France:

'And you will be a long time upon the road. In Harlech you will feast for seven years, with the Birds of Rhiannon singing to you, and the head will be as good a companion to you as ever it was when it was on me. And in Gwales in Pembroke, you will be four score years, and until you open the door towards Aber Henfelen, facing Cornwall, you may stay there and the head will not decay. But from the time you open that door, you cannot remain there; go to London and bury the head.'

The seven survivors, with Branwen, cross the sea and land at Aber Alaw, in Anglesey. Then Branwen looks on Ireland and the Island of the Mighty:

'Oh Son of God,' she said, 'alas that I was ever born. Two good islands have been laid waste because of me!' And she gave a great sigh and her heart broke then. And a four-sided grave was made for her and they buried her there on the banks of the Alaw.

The men go on with the head to Harlech and rest there and even as they began to eat and drink there came three birds who sang them a certain song, and of all the songs they had ever heard, each one was unlovely compared to that song. And far must they look to see them out over the ocean, yet were they as clear as if they were with them. And there they feasted seven years.

At the end of the seventh year they set out for Gwales in Pembroke and there, overlooking the sea, was a fine, royal place for them, with a great hall. They went into the hall and saw two open doors and a third one closed, that faced Cornwall. 'See,' said Manawydan, 'yonder is the door we may not open.' That night they lacked for nothing and were joyful. And notwithstanding all the sorrows they had witnessed and they had suffered, they had no remembrance of it, nor of any sorrow in the world. And there they passed the four score years, not aware that they had ever spent a time more joyous and pleasant than that. They were no more restless than when they came there, nor could one tell by the others that time had passed.

And all the while, the head of Bendigeidfran remains benignly with them. But at the end of those eighty years one of their number opens the third door and the spell

of the Celtic Otherworld is broken.

This is what Heilyn son of Gwyn did one day. 'Shame on my beard,' he said, 'if I do not open the door, to know if what is said about it is true.' He opened the door and looked on Cornwall and Aber Henfelen. And when he looked, they were as conscious of every loss they had ever suffered and of every kinsman and companion they had ever missed, and of every misery that had befallen them as if it had happened right then; and above all because of their lord. And from that hour they could not rest, but set out with the head for London.

As for Ireland, only five pregnant women remain alive after the disaster. They bear five sons who, when they grow to manhood, each sleep with another's mother and divide the country between them. *And because of that division, the five provinces of Ireland are still so called.*

*Agori y drws a wnaeth, ac edrych ar Gernyw, ac
ar Aber Henuelen. A phan edrychwys, yd oed yn
gyn hyspyssset ganthunt y gyniuer collet a gollyssynt
eiryoet, a'r gyniuer car a chedymdeith a gollyssynt,
a'r gyniuer drwc a dothoed udunt, a chyt bei yno y
kyuarffei ac wynt; ac yn benhaf oll am eu harglw-
yd. Ac o'r gyawer honno, ny allyssant wy orfowys
namyn kyrchu a'r penn parth a Llundain.*

At the end of the seventh year they set out for Gwales in Pembroke and there, overlooking the sea, was a fine, royal place for them, with a great hall. They went into the hall and saw two open doors and a third one closed, that faced Cornwall. 'See,' said Manawydan, 'yonder is the door we may not open.' That night they lacked for nothing and were joyful. And notwithstanding all the sorrows they had witnessed and they had suffered, they had no remembrance of it, nor of any sorrow in the world. And there they passed the four score years, not as we have heard, a weary time, but time more joyous and pleasant than that. They were no more restless than when they came there, nor could one tell by the others that time had passed.

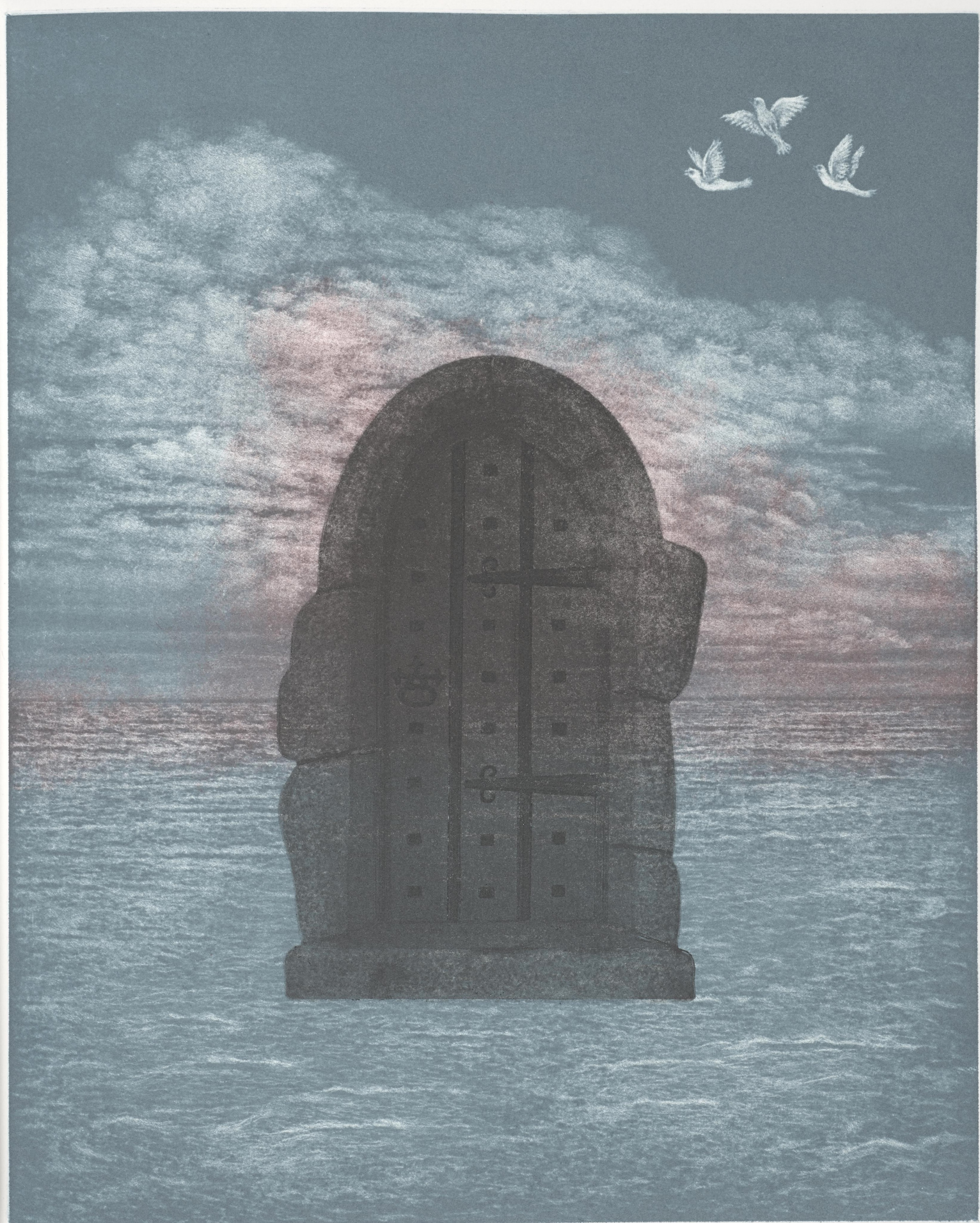
And all the while, the head of Bendigeidfran remains benignly with them. But at the end of those eighty years one of their number opens the third door and the

of the Celtic Otherworld is broken.

This is what Heilyn son of Gwyn did one day. 'I have a beard,' he said, 'if I do not open the door, to know if it is true about it is true.' He opened the door and looked on Cornwall, and Aber Henfelen. And when he looked, they were as innocent of every loss they had ever suffered and of every kindness and companionship they had ever missed, and of every misery that had befallen them as if it had happened right then, and about all persons in the world. And Heilyn said, 'I will not open the door, but I will send the head for London.'

As for Ireland, only the five provinces remain after the disaster. They bear five sons who, when they grow to manhood, each sleep with another's mother, and because of this union, the five provinces of Ireland are still so called.

And the five provinces of Ireland are still so called.



Manawydan Son of Llŷr

In the tale of *Manawydan*, the Otherworld appears in the middle of Dyfed, but this time the enchantment is malevolent. It begins with the burial of Bendigeidfran's head in London, after which his brother, Manawydan, dispossessed and disconsolate, is persuaded by Pryderi, who is another of the seven survivors, to go with him to his own dominion of Dyfed. He promises him lands to rule and his mother, Rhiannon, as his wife: *'I believe you have never listened to a lady better able to converse than she. When she was in her prime, there was no woman lovelier than she, and even now you will not be disappointed with her looks.'* Rhiannon and Manawydan are subsequently wed, and with Pryderi and his wife, Cigfa, they share happiness and friendship in Dyfed.

One night after feasting Manawydan, Pryderi, Rhiannon and Cigfa go with a company to Gorsedd Arberth.

As they were sitting thus, there was a peal of thunder, and at its loudest, a mist descending so that not one of them could see the other. And when the mist lifted, every place was filled with light. And when they looked to where there had been flocks and herds and dwellings, they now could see nothing; neither house nor beast nor smoke nor fire nor man nor dwelling, but the houses of the court empty, desolate, uninhabited, without man or beast in them, their very companions lost, without their knowing anything of what had befallen them, save that they four alone remained.

Horried, they hastily go to search for their people. *Into the hall they came: not a soul was there. Into the sleeping quarters and the chambers they went: no one could they see. In the mead cellars and in the kitchen there was nothing but desolation.*

They exist for two years living off the animals they hunt, off fish and the honey of wild bees. Then Manawydan expresses dissatisfaction with this way of life and suggests they go into England and find a craft to practise, whereby they can make a living.

At first they go to Hereford and become saddlers, but so proficient do they become at their craft they threaten the livelihoods of all the other saddlers, who plot to kill them. Warned of this, the outraged Pryderi is prepared to slay the 'churls', but the more tolerant Manawydan prefers to move to another city and take up, instead, the craft of shield-making. *'Do we know anything about that craft?'* asks the doubtful Pryderi, but Manawydan suggests

they try. In a new town, and at a new craft they once more prove their superiority over the local craftsmen, resulting in fresh plots against them. Again Manawydan will not agree to Pryderi's demand that they retaliate. Instead they move on and in the next town Manawydan proposes they take up shoemaking. *'I know nothing of that,'* Pryderi stoutly objects, but Manawydan professes to know something of the craft and will teach Pryderi. When their spectacular success forces them again to leave, they decide to return to Dyfed and spend a year at Arberth, again supporting themselves by hunting.

One morning Manawydan and Pryderi are out hunting when their dogs retreat, bristling, from a copse they have entered, and out of which a white boar emerges, standing off the dogs, but leading on the men to a lofty fortress, *all newly built, in a place where they had never seen either stone or building.* The dogs pursue the boar into the fortress and, against the advice of the more cautious Manawydan, Pryderi goes after them. Inside, Pryderi sees a bowl of finely worked gold suspended on chains, but when he takes hold of it, he sticks to it and is rooted, speechless, to the ground. Manawydan waits all day for Pryderi then returns to the court. When Rhiannon asks where Pryderi and the dogs are and hears his tale, she tartly chides him, *'God knows you have been a bad comrade, and a good friend you have lost.'* And without another word, off she goes in search of Pryderi and the fortress. But the same fate befalls her as befell her son. Furthermore, after a peal of thunder, they and the fortress disappear.

Manawydan reassures the apprehensive Cigfa that she will not suffer dishonour at his hand. *'Between me and God, were I in the first flush of my youth, I would keep faith with Pryderi.'* Having now no dogs to hunt with and no livelihood to support them, they go once more into England, where Manawydan takes up shoemaking. The pattern is repeated and this time it is Cigfa who urges him not to tolerate the plotting of the churls, but Manawydan again refuses to retaliate and they return, instead, to Dyfed, taking with them a load of wheat.

Manawydan sows three crofts, all of which thrive. When the first is ripe he sets out to reap it only to find the

stalks of wheat have been stripped bare overnight. The same happens to the second croft, and he resolves to keep watch the night before the third is due to be reaped. At midnight he sees a vast horde of mice carrying off the ears. *And then in resentment and anger he rushed in amidst the mice but he could no more keep one of them in sight than the gnats or the birds of the air.* He fails to catch any except one that seems heavy of gait. This one he ties up in his glove, returns to the court and informs Cigfa of his intention to hang the thief in the morning. *'But Lord, . . . it is unseemly for a man of your rank and dignity to hang a creature of that sort,'* she protests.

Nevertheless, Manawydan makes for Gorsedd Arberth with the mouse, to carry out his intention. While planting two forks for a gallows at the highest point, he sees a scholar, in threadbare clothes, approaching. He greets Manawydan, tells him he has been *'singing in England'* and on learning what Manawydan is about expresses dismay, as Cigfa had, that a man of such rank should be engaged in such a demeaning business. *'Thieving I caught it and the law's punishment for stealing will I execute upon it,'* declares Manawydan and refuses the pound the scholar offers in return for the creature's release.

The scholar goes his way, but as Manawydan is fixing a crossbeam on the forks a priest rides towards him, greets him, and again tries to persuade him to release the mouse,

on the grounds that it will defile him. He offers three pounds. *'Between me and God,'* says Manawydan, *'I want no price for it save what is its due: to hang it!'* The priest departs.

Manawydan ties the noose round the neck of the mouse, but before he can draw it up a bishop with all his retinue approaches, and his offer to release *'the worthless creature'* is seven pounds. When this is refused, he increases his offer to twenty-four pounds. Finally, the bishop offers his horses and all his baggage in addition, and when these are refused, he asks Manawydan to name his price. *'That Rhiannon and Pryderi be set free,'* Manawydan replies. He shrewdly increases his demand to include the release of Dyfed from enchantment, insisting moreover to know the identity of the mouse. The bishop confesses she is his wife, and that it is he who cast the enchantment over Dyfed to avenge the insult to his friend Gwawl, the rejected suitor of the first Branch. By magic he had changed his warband into mice to destroy the first crops and then at their request, the women of the court and his pregnant wife, to destroy the third. Still Manawydan refuses to free the mouse until he has exacted a promise that no vengeance be taken on Pryderi, Rhiannon, himself or the lands of Dyfed. When he sees all restored, Manawydan keeps his bargain and the mouse is released and restored to her own form.

*Ac ual y bydant yn eisted yuelly, llyma dŵrŵf, a
chan ueint y tŵrŵf, llyma gawat o nywl yn dyuot
hyt na chanhoed yr un ohonunt wy y gilid. Ac yn
ol y nywl, llyma yn goleuhau pob lle. A phan ed-
rychyssant y ford y guelyn y preideu, a'r anreitheu,
a'r kyuanhed kyn no hynny, ny welynt neb ryw dim,
na thy, nac aniueil, na mwc, na than, na dyn, na
chyuanhed...*



stalks of wheat have been stripped bare overnight. The same happens to the second croft, and he resolves to keep watch the night before the third is due to be reaped. At midnight he sees a vast horde of mice carrying off the ears. *And then in resentment and anger he rushed in amidst the mice but he could no more keep one of them in sight than the gnats or the birds of the air.* He fails to catch any except one that seems heavy of gait. This one he ties up with a glove, and goes to the court and informs Cigfa of his intention to hang the thief in the morning. 'But Lord, ... it is unseemly for a man of

your rank and dignity to hang a creature of that sort.' Nevertheless, Manawydan makes for Gorsedd Arberth with the mouse, to carry out his intention. While planting two forks for a gallows at the highest point he sees a scholar, in threadbare clothes, approaching. He greets Manawydan, tells him he has heard of his intention, and on learning what Manawydan is about expresses dismay, as Cigfa had, that a man of such rank should be engaged in such a demeaning business. 'Thieving I caught it and the law's punishment for stealing will I execute upon it,' declares Manawydan and refuses the pound the scholar offers in return for the creature's release.

The scholar goes his way, but as Manawydan is fixing a crossbeam on the forks a priest rides towards him, greets him, and again tries to persuade him to release the mouse,

on the grounds that it will defile him. 'The silver is seven pounds. *'Between me and God,'* says Manawydan, *'I cannot price for it save what is its due: to hang it!'* The priest is forced to leave.

Manawydan ties the noose round the neck of the mouse, but before he can draw it up a bishop with a retinue approaches, and his offer to release the creature is seven pounds. When this is refused, he offers his horses and all his baggage in addition, and when these are refused, he asks Manawydan to name his price. Manawydan shrewdly increases his demand to include the identity of the mouse. The bishop, who is the king's brother and that it is he who cast the enchantment on the land of the first Branch. By magic he had changed the land into mice to destroy the king and his people. Manawydan tells the women of the court and his prepared to destroy the third. Still Manawydan refuses to release the mouse until he has exacted a promise that he will not be taken on Pryderi, Rhiannon, himself or the land of Dyfed. When he sees all restored, Manawydan makes his bargain and the mouse is released and restored to his former form.



Math Son of Mathonwy

The action of this fourth Branch moves between Gwynedd in North Wales and Dyfed in the South.

It is the fate of Math, Lord of Gwynedd, that when not at war, he cannot live unless his feet rest in the lap of a virgin; she who holds this office is Goewin, the fairest maiden of her time. Math's nephew Gilfaethwy is sick with love for her, and his brother Gwydion promises to set North against South, thereby forcing Math to go to war and leave Goewin unprotected.

Gwydion obtains permission from Math to visit the court of Pryderi in Dyfed to ask for some creatures called pigs he hears have come to the South. Disguised as bards, Gwydion and his company are welcomed at Pryderi's court, where Gwydion, who is the best storyteller in the world, entertains them. Then Gwydion asks Pryderi for a gift: the animals given to him by Arawn, King of Annwn. At first Pryderi maintains he cannot comply, but the following day is persuaded to exchange the pigs for twelve stallions and twelve fine hounds equipped with saddles and bridles of gold, all conjured up by Gwydion's magic. The bargain agreed upon, Gwydion and his troop hastily leave since the magic will not last beyond a day.

They drive the pigs north before journeying on to Math's court, where news of Pryderi's pursuit has already caused Math to muster his forces. Gwydion and Gilfaethwy, however, do not immediately join Math going to prepare for battle, but return instead to the court, where Gilfaethwy rapes Goewin in Math's own bed.

When Math's and Pryderi's forces join battle, there is such slaughter that Pryderi asks Gwydion to meet him in single combat, and Gwydion slays him, through cunning and magic as much as by valour.

Math returns to his court and learns from Goewin how she has been violated. He restores her honour by making her his wife then, forbidding any in the land to offer sustenance to his nephews, he forces the pair to return and accept their punishment. They cannot compensate for the death of Pryderi, nor can they make good their insult to Math, but he exacts a fitting penalty by turning them into wild animals, and for three successive years, first as stag and hind, then boar and sow, and finally as wolf and she-

wolf, they must live like beasts and '*mate in the same manner as the wild beasts in whose shape you are.*'

At the end of the three years Math restores the brothers to their own form and his favour. He even accepts Gwydion's proposal that his sister, Arianrhod, should now become Math's footmaiden. Unfortunately, when her virginity is put to the test by stepping over Math's magic wand, Arianrhod gives birth to two boys and one is hidden away and fostered by Gwydion.

When still a child Gwydion takes the boy to the Caer of Arianrhod where she makes them welcome until her brother tells her it is her son he has brought her. '*Alas, man! What came over you to put me to shame? And to keep it up so long!*' she exclaims, but Gwydion retorts that if she never has anything worse to disgrace her than such a fine boy, she hasn't much to feel ashamed about. Learning the boy has as yet no name, she vows he never will have until she gives him one.

Angered by Arianrhod's refusal to acknowledge her son, Gwydion leaves her court declaring she will give the boy a name notwithstanding her vow. He conjures up a ship out of seaweed and leather out of kelp, and in the guise of shoemakers he and the boy sail into the harbour of Caer Arianrhod. Intrigued, Arianrhod orders a pair of shoes for herself, and is obliged to come to the ship to have her foot measured. While there, she observes the boy leave his stitching to take aim at a wren alighting on the ship. Delighted at his accuracy she comments on the skilful hand of this fair haired lad. Jubilantly Gwydion tells her she has given the boy a good enough name; he shall be called *Lleu Llaw Cyffes*: Bright Skilled Hand. Whereupon Arianrhod angrily swears the boy will never bear arms until she arms him.

Lleu grows to manhood, a proficient horseman, but lacking horse and arms. Once again Gwydion and the youth set off for the court of Arianrhod, this time disguised as bards. Gwydion entertains the company before they retire to bed and at cock crow conjures up in the harbour an imaginary fleet amassed for attack. Alarmed, Arianrhod gratefully accepts Gwydion's offer to defend her household and offering her guests armour, unwit-

tingly arms Lleu herself. The magic fleet disappears and once more Arianrhod learns she has been tricked. Her final curse on Lleu is that he will never have a wife of the race of men.

Gwydion is obliged to turn to Math for help.

'Aye,' said Math, 'Let us seek, you and I, by our magic and enchantment to conjure a wife for him out of flowers' — he being by then a man in stature and the handsomest youth that mortal ever saw. And they took the flowers of the oak and the flowers of the broom and the flowers of the meadowsweet and from these fashioned a maiden, the most graceful and fairest that mortal ever saw. And they baptized her in the form of baptism they used then, and they named her Blodeuwedd. And after the wedding feast, they slept together.

Math then gives Lleu lands of his own in Ardudwy, where everyone is content, except it seems, Blodeuwedd.

One day, in Lleu's absence, she offers hospitality after a day's hunting to Gronw Pebyr, Lord of Penllyn. When they sit down to eat, *Blodeuwedd looked at him, and as she looked, there was no part of her that was not filled with love for him... and the thought that had overcome her overcame him also.*

They declare their love for each other and that night they sleep together. Gronw stays two nights and before he leaves the lovers plot to kill Lleu, and within a year make their attempt, but only partially succeed. Wounded almost to death, Lleu takes flight as an eagle and Gronw supplants his rival.

When Gwydion hears of this, he searches far and wide for Lleu and discovers him, eventually, perched high in an oak tree, his flesh rotting. There is no sorrier sight than the emaciated Lleu when Gwydion restores him to his own form, but the best physicians in the land nurse him back to health and he then seeks revenge.

Hearing Lleu, Gwydion and a host are approaching, Blodeuwedd and her maidens flee to the mountains. Her maidens are drowned in a lake but Gwydion turns Blodeuwedd into an owl, forever to be a bird of the night, persecuted by other birds. As for Gronw, he is pierced by a spear hurled by Lleu, even though a stone is set between them. *And there the stone is, on the bank of the river Cynfael in Ardudwy, and the hole through it. And for that reason it is still called Llech Gronw: Gronw's Stone.*

*'Ie,' heb y Math, 'keisswn ninheu, ui a thi, oc an
hut a'n lledrith, hudaw gwreic idaw ynteu o'r
blodeu.' Ynteu yna a meint gwr yndaw ac yn del-
ediwhaf guas a welas dyn eiroet.*

*Ac yna y kymeryssant wy blodeu y deri, a blodeu
y banadyl, a blodeu yr erwein, ac o'r rei hynny,
asswynaw yr un uorwyn deccaf a thelediwaf a welas
dyn eiroet. Ac y bedydyaw o'r bedyd a wneynt yna,
a dodi Blodeued arnei.*

tingly arms Lleu herself. The magic fleet disappears and once more Arianrhod learns she has been tricked. Her final curse on Lleu is that he will never have a wife of the race of men.

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'Aye,' said Math, 'Let us seek, you and I, by our magic and enchantment to conjure a wife for him out of flowers'—he being by then a man in stature and the handsomest youth that mortal ever saw. And they took the flowers of the meadow, the broom and the flowers of the meadowsweet and from these fashioned a maiden, the most graceful and fairest that mortal ever saw. And they baptized her in the form of baptism they used then, and they named her Blodeuwedd. And after the wedding feast, they slept together.

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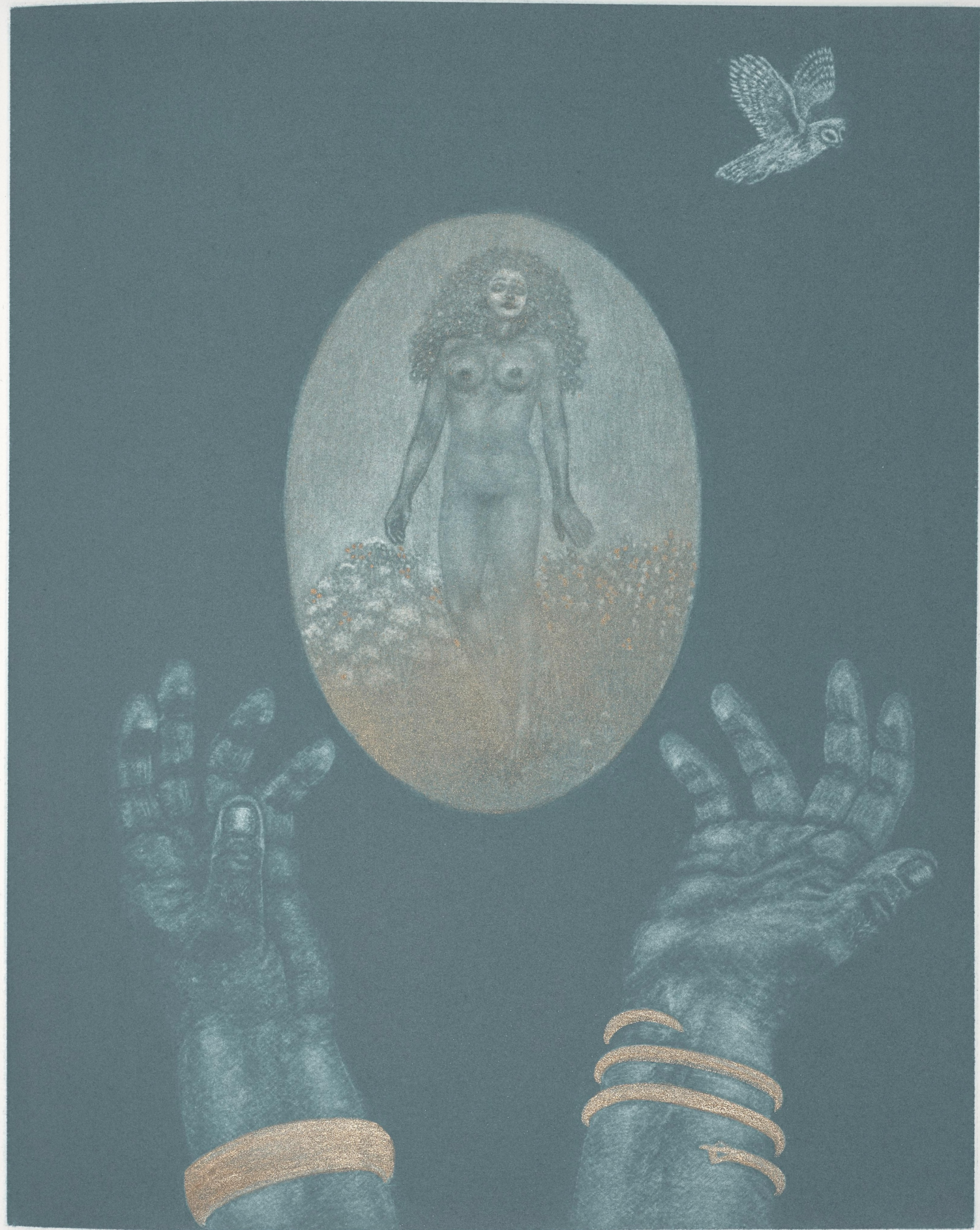
One day, in Lleu's absence, she goes on a day's hunting to Gronw Pebyr, Lord of Penllyn. When they sit down to eat, Blodeuwedd takes a drink, and as she looked, there was no part of her that was not filled with love for him...and the thought that had overcome her overcame him also.

They declare their love for each other and they sleep together. Gronw stays two nights and leaves the lovers plot to kill Lleu, and their attempt, but only partially successful. Most to death, Lleu takes flight and supplants his rival.

When Gwydion hears of this, he goes for Lleu and discovers him, the emaciated Lleu when he is back to health and he then, hearing Lleu, Gwydion and the

maidens are drowned in a lake but Blodeuwedd into an owl, forever in the

spear hurled by Lleu, even though it had a hole through it. And he called Llech Gronw: Gronw's Stone.



The Romance Tales

The three romance tales, *Owain*, *Peredur* and *Geraint fab Erbin* show many signs of Norman French influences. The geography has become vague but the site of Arthur's court is not. It has moved from Cornwall to South-East Wales; Caer Llion or Caerleon is in the border country of Anglo-Norman and Welsh culture. These are hero tales set in the Arthurian mould, but the stature of Arthur has shrunk. This is not the fearless, wild chieftain who won Olwen for Culhwch but a somewhat ineffectual knight-errant engaged in trivial pursuits, overshadowed eventually by his leading knights.

Nevertheless, in spite of French influences and imprecise geography these tales remain Welsh in language, style and feeling. They are sometimes compared unfavourably with those of Chrétien de Troyes, since both authors use the same material, drawn probably from the same sources. But Glenys Goetinck has pointed out that the judges of Welsh romances frequently cannot read the original versions, and reach their conclusions with no knowledge of the variety and richness of the language in which they were written. Moreover the Welsh author wrote for a society very different from Chrétien's, and his literary traditions were not those of twelfth century France. To begin with, his *métier* was not verse. He would have been a *cyfarwydd*, a master of the native prose tradition, the sound and style deployed to create drama, colour and humour. He drew on a subtle range of effects significant to a native audience: a use of ironic understatement, lively dialogue, evocative description and sly cross-references he relied on his audience to recognise.

Above all, the characters of the Welsh tales are not stereotypes; their humanity is emphasised sometimes at the expense of their dignity. These heroes may be knights but they frequent no French King's court and spend little time in Arthur's. The women characters, too, owe more to Welsh tradition than French. Owain's Countess and her feisty handmaid, Luned, are two strong-willed wo-

men with sharp minds and quick tongues, while the Empress in *Peredur* is a powerful Rhiannon figure possessed of supernatural powers, and capable of testing and chiding the man she chooses. Even Geraint's modest, long-suffering Enid is no delicate, fearful creature out of a Continental romance, but a woman with a mind of her own, stubbornly determined to protect her sulky husband from the consequences of his unfounded jealousy.

The question as to who introduced these Welsh romances to the continent is much vexed. Probably several versions were introduced, sometimes altered and rationalised to suit French audiences. The character of *Peredur*, for instance, is noticeably different from his Continental counterparts, *Perceval* and *Parzival*. The reference in the *Black Book of Carmarthen* to *Peredur penwetic* or chief physician reveals *Peredur* as the original hero of the Grail Quest, the high healer of the lame king. His single-minded pursuit of the Quest is as unusual in the context of the romances as his consistently chaste behaviour. He seeks neither wife nor lover and his helpfulness to maidens in distress is motivated by compassion unvitiated by desire. Gwenogvryn Evans points out that Chrétien and Wolfram neither comprehended nor sympathised with *Peredur's* celibate behaviour. Their heroes were amorous, *Peredur* was not, so they made him in their tales very like a fool. Percival and *Parzival* are childish, half-witted, clownish, at least until their tale develops and their conduct perverted to square with the Continental ideal of a knight. *Peredur* is childlike, kept in ignorance of the outside world by his fearful mother, but he is neither foolish nor uncouth.

If the three romances 'have all been off to the Continent and come back in the latest Paris fashions', *Peredur* came back seriously overdressed! *Owain*, however, stayed firmly rooted in the native narrative style, preserving a uniformity of language and expression, and avoiding the pitfalls of digression and incoherence to which *Peredur* is unfortunately subject.



Owain

The tale begins with a delightful vignette of the domestic arrangements at Arthur's court where, *although it was said there was a porter at Arthur's court, there was none, though Glewlwyd Mighty Grasp was there, acting as porter, to receive guests and strangers.* Arthur is in his chamber, sprawled on rushes with a cushion of silk at his elbow, some of his followers with him, and Gwenhwyfar and her ladies sewing at a window. Arthur proposes to take a pre-prandial nap and suggests his men might amuse themselves by telling stories, and Cai could provide them with mead and chops from the kitchen.

'Now,' says Cai, returning with a fistful of chop-laden spits, 'let me have my story.'

'Cynon,' says Owain, 'tell Cai his story!' And Cynon begins.

He relates how, as a somewhat arrogant youth, he set out from his parents' home to find adventure. He comes upon a castle where he is courteously greeted and invited into the hall where twenty-four maidens sit sewing, each one lovelier than Gwenhwyfar on Christmas Day or at Easter Mass. When his host learns that Cynon seeks a challenge, he directs him to a clearing in a forest where he will meet a black giant, with one eye, one foot and a powerful club. Thereafter the giant, though gruff, gives him the information he seeks, directing him to a valley:

In the middle of the valley you will see a great tree, its crown greener than the greenest fir. Beneath that tree is a fountain and beside the fountain a marble slab and on this slab a silver bowl fastened to a silver chain so that they cannot be separated. Take the bowl and throw a bowlful of water over the slab, and then you will hear such a thunderous noise you will think heaven and earth are quaking with the sound. After the thunder there will come a cold shower and scarcely will you suffer it and survive. Hailstones will fall and after the shower there will be clear weather, but the tree will not have one leaf that the shower has not carried away. And then a flight of birds will alight on the tree, and never have you heard in your own land a song as delightful as their song. But even when their singing is most pleasurable you will hear a great groaning and moaning coming towards you along the valley, and you will see a knight on a pure black horse.

The youth proceeds through a vale to a fountain be-

neath a great tree. As instructed he throws a bowlful of water on a marble slab conjuring up a deafening clap of thunder followed by a shower of hail of dreadful ferocity. *'And I was sure, Cai, that neither man nor beast that shower fell on would escape with his life. For never a hailstone of it would stop for skin nor flesh, till bone checked it.'* Cynon survives by sensibly sheltering under his shield but it denudes the tree of foliage. A flight of birds alight on it and start to sing but even as he listens to these he hears, as he had been warned, the Black Knight thundering towards him, berating him for the damage the hailstones have wrought on his subjects. The knight charges at Cynon, unseats him and makes off with his horse, leaving the shamefaced youth to return the way he came. *'And when I came to the clearing the black man was there, and I tell you, Cai, it is a wonder I did not melt into a liquid pool with shame at the mockery that man heaped on me.'*

But at the castle, no one is discourteous enough to mention his discomfort; rather, hospitality and a fresh horse are given him, *'And God knows, Cai, no man has ever told against himself a tale of greater failure than this.'*

Owain proposes to find this place no one has heard of, though it lies in Arthur's realm. He follows the route described by Cynon and all falls out as before though Owain mortally wounds the Black Knight and pursues him to a shining city. The knight enters but the portcullis is dropped on Owain following close behind and his horse is sliced in two, right through the saddle. The gates come down, leaving Owain's spurs and half his horse outside and Owain and the rest of his horse inside, trapped between the two gates. *Owain was in a quandary.*

In this predicament he sees approaching beyond the gate a richly dressed girl, who asks for the gate to be opened. *'God knows, lady,' said Owain, 'it can no more be opened to you from out here than you can rescue me from in there.'* She remarks that it would be only right for a girl to help him because, *'God knows, I have never seen a better young man for a woman than you.'*

With a ring of invisibility she helps him escape, then hides him in a fine apartment from which he later observes the funeral of the Black Knight and his grieving

widow. She is the loveliest lady he has ever seen and the girl tells him this is her mistress, as wise, generous and chaste as she is beautiful. *'She is called the Lady of the Fountain, wife to the man you slew yesterday.'*

'God knows she is the woman I love best,' declares Owain fervently.

'God knows, she does not love you, not even a little,' retorts the girl. But she promises to go courting on his behalf.

When she enters her mistress's chamber she greets her, but receives no reply. *'What has come over you that you have an answer for no one today?'* she demands.

'Luned,' her lady replied, *'what a face you have, not to come and show respect for my grief, and I was the one who made you wealthy. It was wrong of you.'*

'Faith, I thought you would be more sensible than you are,' Luned retorted. *'It would be better for you to be thinking of making good your husband's loss instead of wishing for what you can never have!'*

'Between me and God,' said the countess, *'I could never make good the loss of my lord with any other man in the world.'*

'You could by taking a husband who would be as good, if not better than he,' said Luned.

'As God is my witness,' the countess declared, *'were it not repugnant to me to kill a creature I have reared myself, I would have you put to death for suggesting something as disloyal as that to me. But I will banish you!'*

'I am glad you have no reason to do so,' said Luned, *'save that I gave you good advice you did not think of for yourself. And shame on whichever of us first sends for the other.'* And Luned goes off.

But the countess rises, follows her to the door, coughs loudly and nods, bringing Luned back. She concedes that since Luned's intention was good, she should explain what she means.

Luned points out that the fountain—and by extension her realm—needs a champion to defend it and no one better qualified than a knight from Arthur's court. She volunteers to go there to find one and the countess gives her leave.

But Luned hides in Owain's chamber until the time comes for her to have returned from Arthur's court, then presents a freshly apparelled Owain to her mistress.

The countess looked hard at Owain and said, 'Luned, this nobleman does not have the look of a traveller.'

'What harm in that lady?' asked Luned.

'Between me and God, that none but he took my lord's life!' said the countess.


'So much the better for you, lady. If he had not been stronger, then he would not have slain him. Nothing can be done about that now, it is over and done with.'

The countess dismisses Luned, seeks the counsel of her advisors and it is agreed Owain should become her husband and defender of the fountain.

After three years Arthur, concerned for Owain's safety, sets out with a great host to seek him, and led by Cynon they arrive at the fountain, where all Arthur's knights in turn are overthrown, until Gwalchmai loses his helm in his attempt and he and Owain recognise each other. Welcomed at the countess's court, Arthur asks her leave for Owain to return with him for three months and reluctantly she agrees. But Owain stays three years.

One day, a woman rides into Arthur's court and taking the ring from Owain's finger, declares him a treacherous deceiver, swears shame on his beard, and rides off. Racked with guilt, Owain leaves the court and roams the countryside, living wild until, close to death, he is found in the park of a widowed countess, who sends one of her maidens to anoint him with a precious ointment. Partly restored and freshly clothed he is made comfortable in a room in her castle, but the countess is mortified when the maiden returns with the empty ointment jar, remarking, *'It is unfortunate for me that sevenscore pounds' worth of precious ointment should be used up on a man without knowing who he is!'* But she orders that he should be cared for.

Owain is able to repay her hospitality, when he is well again, by defending her territory against a marauding neighbour, before continuing his wanderings. Then one day Owain comes upon Luned imprisoned in stone out of loyalty to him, and about to be burned by two youths. He rescues her, is reunited with his lady and remains with her until her death, after which he returns to Arthur's court, leaving only when it is time to take possession of his own lands.



*Ympherued yr ystrat y gwely pren mawr a glassach
y vric no'r fenitwyd glassaf. Ac y dan y pren hwn-
nw y mae fynhawon, ac yn emhyl y fynhawon y mae
llech wawr, ac ar y llech y mae kawc aryant wrth
kadwyn aryant mal na ellir y gwahanu. A chymer y
kawc a bwrw kawgeit o'r dwfyr am ben y llech. Ac
yna ti a glywy twrwsf mawr, a thi a debygy orgry-
mlu y nef a'r dayar gan y twrwsf. Ac yn ol y twrwsf
ef a daw cawat adoer, ac a vyd abreid ytti y diod-
ef hi yn vyw, a chynllysc vyd. Ac yn ol y kawat
hinon a vyd. Ac ny byd vn dalen ar y pren nyr darffo
y'r kawat y diwyn. Ac ar hynny y daw kawat o
adar y discynnu ar y pren, ac ny chlyweist y'th
wlat dy hun eiryoet kerd kystal ac a ganant hwy.*

widow. She is the loveliest lady he has ever seen and the girl tells him this is her mistress, as wise, generous and chaste as she is beautiful. 'She is called the Lady of the Fountain, wife to the man you slew yesterday.'

'God knows she is the woman I love best,' declares Owain fervently.

'God knows, she does not love you, not even a little,' retorts the girl. But she promises to go with him.

When she enters her mistress's chamber she greets her, but receives no reply. 'What has come over you that you make no answer for no one today?' she demands.

'Luned,' her lady replied, 'what a face you have, not to come and show respect for my grief, and that you are so wealthy. It was wrong of you.'

'Faith, I thought you would be more sensible than you are,' Luned retorted. 'It would be better for you to think of making good your husband's loss instead of wishing for what you can never have!'

'Between me and God,' said the countess, 'I could never make good the loss of my lord with any other man in the world.'

'You could by taking a husband better than he,' said Luned.

'As God is my witness,' the countess declared, 'were it not repentant to me to kill a creature I have loved myself, I would have you put to death for suggesting something as disloyal as that to me. But I will banish you!'

'I am glad you have no reason to go on,' said Luned, 'save that I gave you good advice you did not think of for yourself. And should on whichever of us first sends for the other.'

But the countess rises, follows her to the door, coughs loudly and nods, bringing Luned back. She concedes that since Luned's intention was good, she should explain what she means.

Luned points out that the fountain—and by extension her realm—needs a champion to defend it and no one better qualified than a knight from Arthur's court. She volunteers to go there to find one and the countess gives her leave.

But Luned hides in Owain's chamber until the time comes for her to have returned from Arthur's court, then presents a freshly appalled Owain to her mistress.

The countess looked hard at Owain and said, 'No nobleman does not have the look of a traitor.'

'What harm in that lady?' asked Luned.

'Between me and God, that none but he took my lord's life,' said the countess.

'So much the better for you, lady. If he had not then he would not have slain him. Nothing can be done now.'

The countess dismisses Luned and Owain remains in the chamber.

After three years Arthur, coming with his knights, they arrive at the fountain, where the knights are overthrown, and Owain is slain.

One day, a woman rides into the park of a widowed countess, who sends one of her knights to arrest her.

He finds her in a chamber, and she tells him that she is the Lady of the Fountain, wife to the man you slew yesterday.

'God knows she is the woman I love best,' declares Owain fervently.

'God knows, she does not love you, not even a little,' retorts the girl. But she promises to go with him.

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Peredur

Earl Efrog and six of his seven sons were all slain in combat. The youngest, Peredur, is taken by his mother to a remote area to live in order to keep him from the influence of arms and combat. The boy is strong and fleet of foot, but throwing holly darts is the extent of his practice in arms.

One day, he sees three knights on horseback. His mother tells him they are angels, but he goes after them and questions them closely about their accoutrements. His determination to follow them greatly distresses his mother, but she counsels him to go to Arthur's court where he will meet the bravest and most generous men.

The boy sets out on a bony nag with trappings he has fashioned from withes, but before he arrives a knight enters the court, snatches a goblet from Gwenhwyfar and throwing its contents over her, he strikes her, challenging any of those present to fight him for the goblet and avenge this insult. All hang back, fearing he must have magic powers to commit such an outrage. When Peredur arrives and asks to be ordained a knight, Cai and the household, glad of a diversion from the matter of the unanswered challenge, mock him and his decrepit horse. But two dwarfs hail Peredur as the son of Efrog, chief of warriors, and Cai furiously strikes them to the ground telling Peredur to go after the knight who has insulted Gwenhwyfar and when he has taken horse and armour from him, then he can be a knight. The lad goes off to challenge the offender and kills him by piercing him through the eye with a dart.

Owain, meanwhile, roundly rebukes Cai for the mean trick he has played on Peredur and goes after the boy. He finds him dragging the fully armed knight behind him convinced the iron tunic is part of him, until Owain removes it. The boy asks him to give the goblet he has retrieved to Gwenhwyfar and tell Arthur he would serve him always but would never go to his court until he has avenged Cai's injury to the dwarfs. And Peredur goes his way, meeting many knights whom he defeats and sends back to Arthur to do him homage and repeat the threat to Cai.

At a great court where two youths fish in a lake he is

welcomed by a lame, grey-haired man, who tells him he is his uncle and warns him, '*Henceforth ... though you see what is strange to you do not ask about it.*' At another court a second grey-haired uncle teaches him swordsmanship and tells him that when Peredur comes into his full strength, he will yield to none. While conversing with his uncle, two youths enter the hall carrying a bleeding spear. All present set up a great lamentation, but as no explanation is offered, Peredur remains silent. Then two maidens bring in on a silver salver the bleeding head of a man. Again there is lamentation but no comment from his uncle, after which the company continue to eat and drink.

Peredur resumes his travels and so many knights defeated by him arrive at Arthur's court to swear fealty and repeat the threat to Cai that Arthur resolves to go in search of Peredur and end the enmity between them.

At a castle under siege, a maiden is forced by her foster-brothers to seek Peredur's help in return for her favours. Peredur declines to take advantage of her, but nevertheless overcomes the earl who has taken possession of her lands, restores them and when he leaves confesses his love for her.

One night he is discouraged from staying at a mountain castle by its countess, because every night her court is attacked by nine hags, the Witches of Gloucester. But Peredur stays, and at daybreak, hearing screaming, he rushes out indecorously in his shirt and trousers, his sword around his neck to charge after a witch pursuing a shrieking watchman. Peredur flattens her headpiece, but she calls him by name, begs for mercy and tells him it was prophesied he would learn from her how to handle a horse and arms. He spends three weeks at the Witches' Court, obtaining a promise before he sets out again that henceforth the countess's realms would be left in peace.

At the close of day he arrived at a valley, and at the far end of the valley he came upon a hermit's cell. The hermit received him gladly, and there he spent the night. The following day he arose early and when he came outside, snow had fallen in the night, and a wild she-hawk had killed a duck in front of the cell, and with the noise of the horse, the she-hawk flew off and a raven alighted on the flesh of the bird. Peredur stood and likened the exceeding

blackness of the raven, and the whiteness of the snow, and the redness of the blood, to the hair of the woman he loved best, which was as black as jet, and her flesh to the whiteness of snow, and the red of the blood in the white snow to the two red spots in the cheeks of the woman he loved best.

But his reverie is disturbed by knights of Arthur's retinue, not realising he is the knight Arthur has set out to find. Peredur unhorses twenty-four knights in turn, but Cai's excessive rudeness incenses him and he responds with such force he breaks Cai's arm and shoulder. Gwalchmai offers to ask the knight politely to come to Arthur. At this Cai comments sourly, '*Gwalchmai, I am sure you will lead him back by the reins, but with little honour or glory to you, overcoming a knight so worn out with fighting. However, you have overcome many another knight in the same way. While you have your tongue and your fair words a thin linen tunic will be armour enough for you!*'

Gwalchmai replies, '*That might be so, but I think it likely I shall bring back the knight without breaking my arm or shoulder.*' He does and Peredur is persuaded to return with Arthur to Caerllion.

One day, out hunting, Peredur comes to a hall where three bald-headed youths are playing *gwyddbwyll*, a game rather like chess. A fearful maiden tells him her evil, one-eyed father kills anyone who enters without his permission. This great black man spares Peredur, at his daughter's request, but at supper the tipsy Peredur remarks to his host, '*I marvel at how exceedingly mighty you reckon yourself. Who put out your eye?*' Again his daughter intercedes, but the following day the Black Oppressor is killed by Peredur, first telling him he lost his eye fighting against the Black Worm of the Mound.

In pursuit of a monstrous *Addanc*, he encounters a beautiful woman who offers him the help of a stone of invisibility in return for his love. Before she disappears she tells him to seek her '*in the direction of India.*' He arrives at a river valley where he sees a flock of sheep turn from black to white or white to black as they cross the river, on its bank a tall tree half in flame, half green with leaves. A young lord there directs him to the cave of the *Addanc*, which he

kills with the help of the magic stone before going on to kill the Black Worm.

He finds lodgings with a miller in a valley of windmills and borrows money from him before going to joust at a tournament held by the Empress of Constantinople. But the sight of a beautiful maiden, leaning out of a window, has him gazing at her all day instead of going to the tournament. Much to the indignation of the miller's wife he has to borrow more money on the second day, but again misses the tournament, distracted by the maiden. On the third day Peredur's besotted gazing is interrupted with a great blow on the shoulder from the miller's axe-handle reminding him to go to the tournament and earn his keep. The youth grins at the miller, does as he is told and defeating all comers at the tournament he repays his loan many times over. The Empress reveals she is the lady who gave him the stone of invisibility and reminded of his promise, he stays and rules with her fourteen years.

Peredur next appears in the company of Arthur and his knights at Caerllion. A hideous black woman on a yellow mule rides in, greets Arthur and his retinue and roundly rebukes Peredur for his silence at his uncle's court. He had seen the bleeding spear and other marvels yet '*you asked neither their cause nor their meaning. Had you asked, the King would have been made well and the kingdom made peaceful.*' Death and destruction resulted from his silence.

Peredur then resolves to find the meaning of the bleeding spear, and numerous confusing adventures befall him on this quest, including temporary imprisonment and an encounter with a *gwyddbwyll* set, the pieces playing by themselves and quarrelling as if they were men!

Finally Peredur arrives at the hall of the lame, grey-haired man. Here, a fair-haired youth admits he was the Black Maiden as well as the bearer of the bleeding spear and the salver at his uncle's court, the head being Peredur's cousin's slain by the Witches of Gloucester, who also lamed his uncle. It is prophesied Peredur will take revenge. And as implausible as this explanation, is our intrepid hero's decision to enlist the aid of Arthur and his retinue to slay the nine hags!

*A diwed y dyd ef a daw y dyffryn, ac yn diben y
dyffryn ef a doeth y gudygyl meudwy. A llawen uu
y meudwy wrthaw, ac yno y bu y nos honno. Tra-
nnoeth y bore ef a gyfodes y vynydd, a phan daw
allan yd oed kawat o eira gwedy ryodi y nos gynt,
a gwalch wyllt gwedy rylad hwyat yn tal y kudygyl.
A chan twrwf y march, kyfodi y walch a disgynnu
bran ar y kic yr ederyn. Sef a oruc Peredur, sefyll
a chyffelybu duhet y vran a gwynder yr eira a choc-
hter y gwaet, y wallt y wreic uwyhaf a garei, a oed
kyn duhet a'r muchyd, a'e chnawt y wynder yr eira,
a chochter y gwaet yn yr eira gwyn y'r deu van
gochyon yg grudyeu y wreic uwyhaf a garei.*



blackness of the raven, and the whiteness of the snow, and the redness of the blood, to the hair of the woman he loved best, which was as black as jet, and her flesh to the whiteness of snow, and the red of the blood in the white snow to the two red spots in the cheeks of the woman he loved best.

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Gwalchmai replies, 'That might be so, but I think it likely I shall bring back the knight without harm to you.' He does and Peredur is persuaded to return with Arthur to Caerllion.

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kills with the help of the magic stone before he can kill the Black Worm.

He finds lodgings with a miller in a castle and borrows money from him to enter a tournament held by the Emperor. He is attracted by the sight of a beautiful maiden.

He has him gazing at her all day and night, much to the miller's discontent. Much to the miller's

displeasure, he enters the tournament, but is defeated. He is reminded of the miller's daughter and

heavily blows on the shield, reminding him to go to the miller's daughter.

He is then seen by the miller's daughter, who is

feeling all corners of the castle, and he is seen by the miller's daughter.

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WELSH TEXTS USED:
Sir Ifor Williams: *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*
Glenys W. Goetinck: *Historia Peredur vab Efreuac*
Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans: *Culhwch ac Olwen*
R. L. Thomson: *Owein*



The Stones and Other Evocations

TITLE PAGE: The Llywel Stone — early Christian, probably fifth century. Originally in the graveyard of Capel Illud, near Brecon, now in the British Museum. The five legged ant at its base is my addition!

CULHWCH AND OLWEN: The portal stone of New Grange passage grave in Louth, Ireland — Neolithic or Bronze Age. It was in Ireland the hunt for the giant boar, Twrch Trwyth, began.

PWYLL PRINCE OF DYFED: The Bridell Ogham Stone from the churchyard of Bridell, near Cardigan —

very early Celtic British. The White Horse of Uffington, carved into the chalk of the Berkshire downs, is believed to have been sacred to the Celtic horse goddess, Epona, Rhiannon's mythological origin.

MANAWYDAN SON OF LLYR: The Cross of Saint Padarn at Llanbadarn Fawr, near Aberystwyth — sixth century, probably, since Paternus was a contemporary of Saint David.

BRANWEN DAUGHTER OF LLYR: Inner door in Brecon Cathedral, formerly a priory — twelfth century.



Y Morgrugyn Cloff — The Lane Ant

Seven tales from The Mabinogion introduced & abridged by Shirley Jones, but still preserving their full flavour, with her translations in italic of passages selected to convey the humour, irony & lyricism that permeate these stories. Seven of her images in mezzotint, aquatint & relief etching are interleaved with Unryushi tissue printed with the Welsh passages they illustrate. The English text was set in 14-point Baskerville typeface, at Gwasg Gregynog, & printed throughout by Shirley Jones, on Rives mouldmade paper, in an edition of 40. This is copy 39

Shirley Jones '99

